Franklin High School's 50th Anniversary Cornerstone Ceremony
Remarks by John Kucinski, Class of 1971

Thanks, Doug (Schmidt), and thanks for all you did to make this event and the weekend’s activities happen.

Mayor Taylor, Dr. Patz, Principal Nowak, Ms. Petric, Coach Bach, Mr. Megna, Dan and Bonnie Diedrich, Doug, honored classes of 1965, '66, and '67, distinguished guests, teachers, administrators, coaches, alumni, students, family and friends...

It is my sincere honor to be representing my Dad and the family, although I would've preferred that he be the one speaking to you right now. Dad passed away in September of 2000. If he were here today I'm sure he would be incredibly proud of the many life-long accomplishments and successes of those gathered and represented here today, as well as those who have had a hand in the continuing success of Franklin High School. While “Forward” is the high school motto and the very first word in the very first yearbook of the 1962-63 school year, this is a day that allows us to both reflect back with pride and look ahead to the future, hopefully aware that the next 50 years will go by and things will change just as quickly, and probably even faster, than they did over the last 50 years.

First, a disclaimer...To the honored classes of 65, '66, and '67, I'm afraid you all tied for second place as my Dad's favorite classes during his 28-year tenure as principal. His favorite class, of course, was my class of 1971. By the way, that puts my sister Mary's class of 1976 in 5th place, at best, not that we're keeping score or continuing our sibling rivalry or anything silly like that. Our Mom, Eunice, seated there would have none of that. Not only did Mom manage to control my sister and me, she was also a life-long supporter of Dad and made many of his accomplishments possible. Plus, back in the day alongside some of the folks represented here, she was looking mighty good on stage with the first-ever Prom Court at Franklin High.

As the planning for today's event started to unfold, Doug suggested I say a few words about the early days of FHS. Now remember, I was only 9-years-old when this all started, but even then I sensed there was something special about what was going on, and many of the memories stuck, unlike today when I keep forgetting where I put my keys or why I headed out to the garage in the first place. But I distinctly remember the cornerstone and time capsule ceremony held 50 years ago, and one of the things I remember is that it was just as cold outside as it is today. Therefore I hereby boldly predict that in another 50 years it will be pretty much like today.

As the first principal of Franklin High School and being in the job from 1962 to 1990, Dad experienced some incredible highs as well as some heartbreaking lows. In other words, he and all the citizens of Franklin, students included, experienced our evolving modern life together. Dad would be the first to admit he wasn't perfect, but I think he was perfectly suited for the role as the school's first principal. He was well aware of the rare opportunity and awesome responsibility he had to affect a community and thousands of young people over decades, not to mention establishing a high standard of education and extracurricular activities. Of course, he couldn't possibly do any of this alone. As has already been mentioned, the School Board and District Administration had the vision to establish a quality high school in what was then primarily a farming community. Franklin citizens followed their lead by contributing significant resources to get the school built and staffed. What followed, and continues to be, is a success story made possible by the dedication of the School Board, Administration, Faculty, Coaches, Advisors, Parents, Staff and Students.
My earliest memories of the high school involve construction blueprints, REAL blueprints, meaning they were the color blue and freshly smelled of the ammonia used to process them. Those blueprints were spread all over our kitchen table as Dad reviewed the work being done by the school’s original architect, Dick Boswell and Associates. Dad took the time to try to explain to me what we were looking at, but mostly I remember the ammonia smell.

Site visits...even my then-4-year-old sister remembers these. While the school was under construction, it seemed like every single weekend Dad would drag my sister and me up to these hallowed grounds while he proudly showed off the construction progress to a visiting friend or relative. I distinctly remember trudging through graded mud to stand on the open-air concrete slab of what was to become the cafeteria, theater, and study hall (right over there), and is still a multi-purpose room. Many of the alumni here today will recall the after-the-game Friday night dances, and Homecoming, that were held in the room. I remember Dad describing an early dance event when WOKY disk jockey Bob Barry was the host. It was a fundraiser for something at the school, but some of the proceeds had to go to repair a window that was broken due in part to the overflowing crowd. (In fact, I think it was this window here.)

Fellow alumni of a certain age...Remember how loud the live bands were back in the day?! It's amazing we can hear at all today.

As I mentioned, the construction site visits occurred weekly. I can remember the building taking shape and jumping off the blueprints into tangible 3-dimensional space...the walls and roof going up; the HUGE gym, at least it seemed that way to a 9-year-old; my Dad's office, which was complete with a bathroom; the fallout shelter in the basement, identified by the little black and yellow cold war era nuclear symbol and containing freeze-dried food for something like 360 people to survive a nuclear holocaust. Then there's the pond at the base of the front hill that was required for fire-fighting water; and, speaking of water, I remember the funny tasting stuff that came out of the school's bubblers directly from its extra-deep well.

Other things I remember...

In the early days all the teachers had to turn in their lesson plans in advance for my Dad's review. They were in red and blue covered notebooks with large blocks for each class period. I believe it was a weekly or maybe biweekly review. There was a system where the notebooks were placed back in the teachers' mail slots in the main office, which I helped Dad do. While Dad looked at each of them before approving and signing them, I'm not sure he READ each one, but I think the fact that the teachers knew he was looking at them helped keep the curriculum on track.

Also in the main office was a phone switchboard, complete with a headset and wires that had to be plugged in to transfer calls that came into the main phone number, which was GArden 1-5100, later known as 421-5100.

Another thing I remember Dad doing both in the office and at home, often after dinner, was signing countless requisitions for school supplies, in quadruplicate with white, pink, green and yellow copies, with carbon paper in-between (remember that?) before they headed to the district office at Country Dale School for processing. I remember there was a bit of understandable professional tension between Dad, who was trying to outfit the new school, and the district business manager, Mr. Gesheidle, who was trying to keep all the spending within the school's tight budget.
Dad helped implement the city’s vision that everyone who graduated from Franklin High should have a chance to succeed. That meant teaching college-bound students as well as those headed for the trades, a goal I’m proud to say that continues at the high school today. Shop classes, Typing, Short Hand, which back then meant way more than LOL, and Home Economics, to name a few, were as important as Algebra, English, and History. And let’s not forget Gym class, which may have been my personal favorite, especially when Coach Jim Keepers was controlling the class, sort of.

Speaking of Coach Keepers, I’m reminded that sports have always played a significant role at the high school. Understandably there weren’t a lot of early victories as we, and by we I mean the boys’ teams since it would be a few years before girls’ teams were formed, competed mostly against larger and more-established schools. To put things in perspective, remember that our first graduating class had fewer members in it than the great FHS band we saw perform last night at the Homecoming game. But our size didn’t mean we weren’t competitive and our first graduating classes honored today did have many successes, started moving up in the Parkland Conference standings, and sent many athletes and eventually teams to state competitions. As athletic director and varsity football coach, Coach Lou Bach had a major hand in setting those standards and teaching us life-long lessons. That said, Coach Bach, I think I represent all of the football players who had the privilege of playing for you when I say our fondest football memories are NOT of the snake pit.

There were plenty more extra-curricular activities beyond sports. Some of these were the Astronomy Club, the Computer Club (and I’m not even sure computers had been invented yet), Creative Sewing, Electronics, Library Service, Debate, Forensics, Dramatics, Fashion, Campfire, Campfire Kids, Future Teachers, Girls Athletic Association, Franklin Historical Society, Chess, Saber Slate, Service Club, Hobby Club, Vocations Club, Letterman's Club, Newspaper Club, Rod and Gun Club, Photography Club, Pep Club, Audio Visual, Future Business Leaders, Amateur Radio Club, Bridge, and Chinese Mandarin Club. Obviously the early classes, like today’s students, had eclectic interests and were in many ways very forward thinking.

I was obviously kidding about computers not being invented because I remember the high school was one of just six in the nation that qualified to receive a computer in the mid-1960’s with funding from the federal government. Dad was especially proud that the school’s early accomplishments, and perhaps even the Computer Club, led to that. You see, back when he teaching math in the 1950’s he helped write one of the first computer textbooks during a summer spent at the University of Michigan. The FHS computer was straight out of a classic James Bond movie with whirling magnetic tapes, all kinds of blinking lights, reams of green-lined computer paper, and punch cards. Woe to anyone who didn’t put their punch cards in the right order or messed up the sequencing of starting up the machine. The computer took up the space of what is now the upper level bleacher section in the gym (right over there). It required lots and lots of power and air conditioning. In the mid-1980’s I had the pleasure of having lunch with our computer director, John Stanard, who attended many of the honored classes’ reunions until his recent passing. I asked John how much memory the original FHS computer had and he said 16K, which was remarkable for the time, but is easily dwarfed over ten million times by my 28 gigabyte iPhone. As primitive as it seems in retrospect, the first FHS computer gave many of us a jump-start on the future. Forward...we were always looking forward.

For being a new school of our small size, we also had great arts, theater, and music programs. I remember that Al Treske, our music teacher and bandleader who recently passed away, wrote the school fight song, which I enjoyed hearing at last night’s game. I remember watching countless plays and musicals and band performances that were put on in the cafeteria while we sat on the always-comfortable
metal folding chairs. I also remember someone in one of the earliest classes, brothers perhaps, who created and molded models of futuristic cars they designed themselves. As I recall the awe of looking at those cars, I think today they would still be considered futuristic.

Another thing I remember is the successful human rights campaign that was vigorously supported by the honored classes to allow a Franklin High teacher’s Japanese wife be allowed into our country, there being unreasonable immigration restrictions in place at the time. Their efforts were noted in the Milwaukee Journal and Sentinel, which were two separate newspapers at the time, and on local TV. To this day I still enjoy telling people that story coupled with the fact that I was taught Spanish by a man named Yukio Itoh.

There are hundreds if not millions of other memories associated with the early days of Franklin High, but we also need to remember the school’s motto is “Forward.” So 50 years from now, after our cornerstone has been opened and later likely enhanced with more items from today’s generation of students, another ceremony like this one can take place. Doug, I’m leaving it to you and maybe one of today’s students or maybe a 9-year old in the audience to remember that and start planning that event.

In closing I’d like to pass along two timeless pieces of advice from my Dad that can help ensure success in life. The first one, heard countless times in the halls of FHS and directed toward many in this audience, is “Tuck in your shirt, mister!”

The second piece of advice, also in Dad’s own words, comes from that very first 1962-63 yearbook I mentioned earlier. In it Dad wrote to the students...

“The future poses a tremendous challenge to you. You have shown us, the faculty and administration, that you have the thirst for knowledge, the spirit to succeed, and the will to accomplish your endeavors. Let these years of learning here at Franklin High School be a step up the ladder of success in each of your lives.”

Here’s wishing another wonderful 50 years of success for everyone associated with, and passing through the halls of, Franklin High School.

Thank you.